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New owners learning ropes at Mobjack Bay Marina

BY SHERRY HAMILTON ON MAY 18, 2022

SHERRY HAMILTON / GAZETTE-JOURNAL Marisa and Bill Walpert recently purchased Mobjack Bay Marina at North from longtime owner Darlene Talbott.

Bill and Marisa Walpert recently purchased Mobjack Bay Marina at North from longtime owner Darlene Talbott and are busy learning the ropes of marina ownership.

"Every day is a learning experience," said Bill Walpert. "I get a new lesson every day—usually the hard way."

Relative newcomers to the world of boating, the couple said they feel fortunate to have found such a well-established, nicely-kept marina, with happy customers. They said Talbott has been an invaluable source of information.

"Bill calls her, and she just knows," said Marisa. "Boat owners, boat names, their slip numbers. She can remember everything."

Not only that, but the boat owners themselves have stepped up to help out.

"They're very helpful and have great ideas," said Bill.

The couple said their first tasks since taking over have been to convert the marina's paper records to digital records and to upgrade internet access. They want to be able to offer automatic billing for convenience and web cam access so boat owners can check their boats when they're offsite. The ship's store is going to get some attention, as well, said Bill. It will be revamped and new stock will be added. There's now an ice machine, and they've applied for a license to sell beer.

"It's still an ongoing process," he said. "Everything takes a little more time than we think it's going to."

The couple's goal is for the marina to be a place for people to come and have fun, said Marisa. She said they want it to be a vibrant place, with lots of activity and people enjoying themselves and their boats.

Virginia Beach residents, the Walperts learned about the marina from a friend and neighbor who grew up in Mathews, Beth Anderson Strangways. She told Marisa that a friend of her mom's had a beautiful house for sale, and that it had a marina as part of the property. Marisa immediately looked up the property on Zillow and was intrigued. She showed it to Bill and "he got really excited," she said. After a while, he asked her, "How serious am I allowed to be about this?"

"At that moment," said Marisa, "It occurred to me, 'I think we're going to buy a marina.'"

The Walperts moved to Virginia Beach six years ago when Bill, a U.S. Air Force colonel, was stationed there. He retired in 2020 after 26 years' service. Marisa, an R.N., became a stay-at-home mom when the couple adopted their two daughters. She said that, after moving 12 times in 22 years, she was determined to stay wherever they ended up when Bill retired.

"There have been many, many years of missed holidays and birthdays," said Bill. "A great aspect of retirement is I get to be around the family and the community all the time."

The family had never owned a boat before they moved to Virginia Beach, but they found they enjoyed water sports and water-related activities, and they ended up buying one. Then, a marina. They both recently turned 50, said Marisa, and "felt like it was the right time to have a new, unexpected adventure."

For the time being, Bill is spending Friday through Monday in Mathews and going home mid-week, while Marisa and the girls are at home during the school week and spending weekends in Mathews. Over the summer, their older daughter plans to work at the marina on weekends.

"Fortunately, it's not so far that you can't do it in a day," said Marisa.

Last week's spate of bad weather caused the tide to come across the marina's bulkheads and over some of the docks, said Bill, but the boat owners pitched in and helped tighten lines. While the marina was left with a lot of "tide flotsam and jetsam" to deal with, he said, "You walk outside on a day like this, when the sun's out and it's calm, and you think, 'How bad can it be?'"

"This is really just such a beautiful place," said Marisa. "I ask myself, what did I do in life to deserve this?"

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